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ABSTRACT

Reviewed is research on the bilingual child with learning problems. The author notes that a disproportionately large number of non-English speaking children are placed in special education classes for the educable mentally retarded, and that this group is underrepresented in classes for the learning disabled. It is suggested that appropriate tools for evaluation of bilingual children be developed and used, and that specific remedial programs be planned for each child. (IM)

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Although much attention has been paid in recent years to the culturally different child who is experiencing learning problems, relatively little has been written specifically concerning the needs of the bilingual child who is experiencing such problems. Shutt and Hannon (1974) and Sabatino, Kelling, and Hayden (1973) have stated that the evaluation of bilingual pupils for special services poses particular difficulties because the validity of many commonly available assessment instruments for use with culturally and/or linguistically different students has been seriously questioned in the literature (Bartel, Grill, and Bryen, 1973; Bryen, 1974, 1976; Hickey, 1972; Sabatino, Hayden, and Kelling, 1972). Recently, courts too have questioned the validity of certain tests when used to identify potential recipients of special services (Covarrubias v. San Diego Unified School District, 1971; Diana v. State Board of Education, 1970; Guadalupe v. Tempe Elementary School District, 1972).

Many suggestions of how we can more accurately evaluate the bilingual child's educational and intellectual functioning have been offered, including translations of commonly used verbal test items and test instructions, the use of nonverbal tests, and the use of "culture-free" tests. However, problems have been raised with each of the above mentioned alternatives (e.g., direct translations fail to consider other forms of cultural bias, nonverbal tests are usually standardized on white, middle-class students, if only nonverbal tests are used, a diagnosis of the child's verbal abilities in his primary language is not obtained). The question of how we can most accurately evaluate a bilingual child's educational and intellectual functioning has not yet been adequately answered.

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Research has indicated that a disproportionately large number of non-English speaking children are placed in special education classes for the educable mentally retarded (Dunn, 1968; Riles, 1969) and it has been suggested that this results, at least in part, because of the testing instruments frequently used for evaluation and classification purposes. Furthermore, it has been suggested that minority group children tend to be disproportionately underrepresented in classes for the learning disabled implying that the currently used tests are culturally biased against minority group children and thus many children obtain depressed scores on intelligence tests. Therefore, many of these children are labeled educable mentally retarded incorrectly. There is also empirical evidence which suggests that certain psychoeducational placement tests do not measure the learning abilities they were intended to measure when used with linguistically and/or culturally different children (Sabatino, Hayden, & Kelly, 1972). That certain children receive inappropriate educational services is very significant. First, one must consider the research findings relating to teacher expectancy, which have indicated that expectancy influences children's achievement (Buford, 1973; Rist, 1972). Second, if the child's problem is basically one related to language development it may well be completely overlooked in certain educational placements; for example some classes for educable mentally retarded children have been accused of implementing a "watered-down" regular curriculum without much individualized instruction. A child placed in such a setting may receive no more appropriate language remediation than he or she had been receiving prior to placement. Thus, the child has been labeled but is not any better off than before he was labeled. As a matter of fact, he is worse off since he now carries a label on his or her record and the stigma which is attached to it.

Recent evidence suggests that the below-average school achievement of many

bilingual students is due to the lack of adequate educati nal provisions for the bilingual child, cultural isolation, and handicaps in the child's second language rather than generally lower intelligence, as was once thought (Gezi, 1974). Numerous researchers have concluded that children from linguistic minority groups should be instructed in their mother tongue and that bilingualism should be allowed (Kangas, 1973). There is much support in the literature for initial teaching, and beginning reading instruction specifically, to be provided in the child's mother tongue (Modiano, 1966; Pryor, 1967; UNESCO, 1953).

It is essential that the learning problems of bilingual students be identified and remediated. This requires that appropriate tools for the evaluation of bilingual children be developed and used. In addition, specific remedial programs should be planned for each child in order to help that child to overcome his or her particular learning problems.

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